

## RECREATION FEE ACCOUNT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

NAME OF FEE PROJECT: Colorado River (Moab)

STATE: Utah

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**DESCRIPTION:** The Moab Field Office manages private and commercial river recreation on the Colorado River. The Colorado "Daily" is Utah's most popular whitewater river recreation area, with approximately 77,155 visitors in 2011. The area is served by 22 commercial outfitters; thousands of private boaters also float it every year. BLM maintains seven boat ramps along the river with toilet facilities, parking and other infrastructure. Many of the boat ramps also have associated camping facilities. Park rangers based in Moab patrol the Daily section and provide visitor services.

The internationally known, technically challenging, Westwater Canyon section of the Colorado River is a BLM Special Area, where both commercial and private use are fully allocated through a launch system. This launch system is administered through an advance reservation program operated by the Moab Field Office. About 15,000 people floated Westwater with 18 commercial outfitters or on private trips in 2009. The Westwater Ranger Station serves as the put in for the Westwater trip, as well as the takeout for a Colorado float trip through the McInnis Canyon NCA. Camping facilities are also provided at Westwater Ranger Station. Additionally, a ramp for the take out from the Westwater float trip is provided at Cisco. The BLM houses three river rangers at the Westwater Ranger Station, providing 24 hour a day coverage supporting river management operations during the nine month season.

Operation of the Colorado River program could not be accomplished without funding from the UT02 fee account. The account pays all river ranger salaries, all reservation and permit office expenses, including salary, all vehicle costs, all equipment and supply costs, and all patrol costs.

**FEE SCHEDULE:** Outfitters pay the 3% commercial use fee for all Colorado River trips (as set by BLM fee policy). In addition, all private boaters and commercial passengers pay a \$7.00 per person per trip Special Area fee for Westwater Canyon. There is no charge for private use of the "Daily".

### SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS THIS YEAR

General Accomplishments: UT02 funds paid for the maintenance and operation of the Westwater ranger station in full. The station is staffed by three river rangers, who are paid out of UT02 funds. These rangers do regular routine safety patrols in Westwater Canyon. The station complex includes a public drinking water system, staff housing, a boat ramp, toilets and a campground; all are maintained by UT02 funds. The ranger station is remote, and is furnished

with radios, cell phones and a satellite phone for safety purposes. UT02 funds pay for the yearly mucking out of all nine boat ramps, which is a continual and recurring expense after the river recedes in the spring. These funds also pay for such supplies as toilet paper and trash bags.

Visitor Services, Interpretation: UT02 funds support the on-going volunteer program at Westwater (WAVE: Westwater Association Volunteers for Excellence). These volunteers provide additional safety patrols in the canyon, as well as assist with safety checkins at Westwater. Subsistence and volunteer uniforms components are provided through UT02 funds.

Repair, Maintenance, and Facility Enhancement: The 2011 fiscal year saw the doubling of capacity at the primary “Daily” take out ramp. The ramp was widened to six concrete lanes. River informational kiosks were painted and signs refurbished. A new high pressure water cleaning unit was purchased to better clean the toilets. UT02 funds bought Law Enforcement gear and safety dry suits for river rangers. New toilets were purchased for the Westwater Ranger Station, and new toilet doors were purchased for other boat ramp locations.

Law Enforcement – Public Use and Recreation: Law Enforcement services are provided at Westwater and along the Daily using UT 02 funds.

Wildlife Habitat Restoration, Resource Protection: River rangers regularly patrol Westwater Canyons for invasive weeds; by removing these weeds, resources are protected and habitat improved.

Fee Agreements and Reservation Services: UT02 funds support the launch system operation in Moab, which allocates river use throughout the year.

#### Moab Field Office Recreation Program, Economic Contribution and Visitation

The Moab Field Office has a diverse and extensive recreation program. The red rock scenery in the Moab area is iconic and is highly sought after by local, national and international visitors. Features such as the Colorado River, Fisher Towers, Castle Rock, Slickrock Bike Trail and Gemini Bridges attract visitors from all over the world, who recreate both privately and by hiring commercial outfitters for river trips.

Arches National Park is enveloped by lands managed by the Moab Field Office; Canyonlands National Park and Dead Horse Point State Park are located along the field office’s western boundary.

Visitation to BLM lands in the Moab Field Office is very high, totaling approximately 1.8 million visits in 2011. This visitation exceeds that of Arches National Park. Table 1 displays the average number of recreation visits over the past five years to both Moab Field Office and Arches National Park lands.

**Table 1: Recreation Visits to Moab Field Office and Arches National Park over a Five Year Period**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Visits to Moab Field Office</b>	<b>Visits to Arches National Park</b>
2007	1,493,700	860,181
2008	1,706,389	928,795
2009	1,674,504	996,312
2010	1,834,724	1,014,405
2011	1,809,702	1,023,669 (YTD NOV 2011)

Visitation to the Moab area grew at a 9% rate during the 1990's, but has since leveled off to an approximately 2% yearly growth rate. Thus, it is anticipated that recreation visitation will continue to grow, but at this lower rate (*Economic Value of Public Lands in Grand County, Utah, 2011*, Headwaters Economics).

The recreation programs provided by the Moab Field Office, including that of Special Recreation Permit administration, are particularly important to the Grand County economy. A recent study commissioned by Grand County and conducted by Headwaters Economics (*Economic Value of Public Lands in Grand County, Utah, 2011*) found that the economy of Grand County is heavily dependent upon public lands recreation use. It is unlikely that any other county in the United States that is surrounded by BLM lands is as heavily dependent on public recreation lands for its economic well-being. All Moab river businesses are BLM Special Recreation Permit holders.

The most reliable information on visitor demographics, such as from where visitors to Moab BLM originate, comes from 2006 data gathered for the National Visitation Use Monitoring (NVUM) study. This was prepared by the U.S. Forest Service (U.S. National Forest Service, 2007) for the Moab BLM. Results from this survey indicate that the great majority of recreation visitors to Moab BLM travel large distances to come to the area.

## **PROJECTS/ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR NEXT SEVERAL YEARS (FY12 and out):**

The Moab Field Office plans the following projects in UT02 for FY 12 and beyond:

- A 150 car parking lot at Westwater Ranger Station to provide organized parking for the boaters taking out at Westwater after their float trips through the McInnis Canyons NCA.
- A separate boat ramp and camping facilities for McInnis Canyons NCA visitors
- Installation of new toilets at Westwater Ranger State
- Accessible facilities at Dewey Bridge, including shade shelters, walkways and an accessible parking area to serve persons with disabilities who are floating the Daily
- Construction of a shade shelter at the Cisco Take Out (serving Westwater)
- Construction of shade shelter at the Rocky Rapid boat ramp (serving the Daily)
- Yearly maintenance of boat ramps after high water recedes in June
- Upgrade primary boat ramp at Westwater from dirt to concrete
- Construction of a permanent housing unit for Westwater rangers
- Further upgrading of toilets serving boat ramps, including painting, installation of fans and other refurbishing
- Installation of improved signage
- Increased patrol presence on the Daily
- Upgrading boating and safety gear for river rangers
- Increased cleaning services at boat ramp, including cleaning with greater frequencies